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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the hypothesis that black students at Ohio State University who enroll in foreign language courses attain significantly higher grades in foreign languages than in any of their other major academic subjects. Also, five other major academic areas and eight different foreign languages taken by the sample students were tested for significance of difference between their grade point average in each and their overall grade point average. The data were tested by rank and sex of the students. Results support the major hypothesis. Tables of statistical data provide information which supports the findings. (Author/RL)

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SUCCESS OF BLACK STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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This study investigates the hypothesis that black students at The Ohio State University who enroll in foreign language courses make significantly higher grades in foreign languages than in any of their other major academic subjects. Also, five other major academic areas and eight different foreign languages taken by the sample students were tested for significance of difference between their grade point average in each and their overall grade point average, and, the data was tested by rank and sex of the sample students. Results supported the major hypothesis and showed that in no area other than foreign languages were their grades significantly higher than their other grades. Other tests were not significant, statistically; however, some trends can be observed.

Success of Black Students in Foreign Languages

Jane Kollaritsch

In the course of my work as a counselor in the Reading/Learning Skills of the University Counseling Center at The Ohio State University, the black students who came to the Center seemed to need help with all their major academic courses except their foreign language courses. I decided to investigate the hypothesis that black students taking foreign languages here at Ohio State make significantly higher grades in foreign language courses than in their other subjects. Also, providing this hypothesis proved correct, I wished to test four sub-problems: to test for significance of the difference between their foreign language grades and their grades in each of five selected major subjects; to compare their grades in each of these five other major subjects with all their other grades to see if their grades in any of these subjects might also be significantly higher than their other grades; to test the data for significance, according to the sex and rank of the students in the sample; and, finally, to test the grades make in each foreign language, separately, to determine the significance of the difference between their grades in each language as compared with their grades in the other major academic subjects.

Description of the Data

I obtained data from the official records of all of the 54 black students who were enrolled in foreign language courses during Fall Quarter, 1969, here at Ohio State (of a total of approximately 4,000 black students in the University that quarter.) Of these students, nine did not receive grades in their foreign language courses, so the final sample numbered 45. Of the nine students who were eliminated from the sample, too had taken their foreign language on a pass/non-pass

basis; one received an incomplete; and six students dropped their foreign language during the quarter. There were 24 males and 21 females in the group. Twenty-two students were freshmen; eleven were sophomores; seven were juniors; and five were seniors. These students were enrolled in five different colleges of the University: Arts and Sciences, University College, The College of Education, The College of Administrative Science, and The College of Engineering. (See Table I)

The data collected showed that the 45 sample students had taken a total of 96 foreign language courses in eight different foreign languages: Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Hebrew, Swahili, and Russian. Of these languages, most of the students had taken courses in the first three, above. Table 2 shows the grades the students in the sample made in all 96 foreign language courses they took. It was most amazing to note from the data (as demonstrated on Table 2) that only 9% of the sample students made grades below a "C" in their foreign languages. It is just as amazing to note that the students made a "B" or better in the great majority (65) of the 96 total courses, while making a "C" or lower in only 31 of the courses!

Table 3 shows the number of students who took each individual language, the number of courses of each language taken, and the average grades made by the students in each language. The language in which the students took the most courses--Spanish--is also the language in which the students made the highest grades. More students took French than German, but more courses in German were taken. Also, the students' grade average for German is considerably higher than for French.

Nine of the 45 sample students had taken more than two foreign language courses, the data showed. No student had taken courses in more than two

Table 1

Area of Study of Sample Students

College of Enrollment	Number of Students
Arts and Sciences	25
University College	11
College of Education	5
College of Administrative Science	3
College of Engineering	1
Total	45 students

Table 2

Sample Students' Foreign Language Grades

Grade	% Making This Grade	No. of Sample Students Making This Grade
"A"	26%	25
"B"	42%	40
"C"	23%	22
"D"	7%	7
"E"	2%	2
	100%	96

*Note: Many of the 45 students took more than one foreign language course.

TABLE 3

Analysis of Individual Foreign Languages

Foreign Language	No. of Students* Who Took This Language	No. of Courses Taken in This Language	Average Grade in This Language**
Spanish	25	60	2.916
French	13	14	2.357
German	11	19	2.894
Italian	1	1	2.000
Japanese	1	1	2.000
Hebrew	1	1	1.000
Swahili	1	2	4.000
Russian	1	1	4.000

* Note: Many of the 45 students in the sample took more than one foreign language course.
**Note: Based on: "A"=4.00; "B"=3.00; "C"=2.00; "D"=1.00; "E"=0.00

different languages. One student who had taken twelve courses in two different languages--Spanish and French--had received credit for the most foreign language courses of all the students.

Besides the foreign language grades of the sample students, other data collected from their official records included their overall grade point average and their grades in the following five other major subjects: freshman English, history, biology, psychology, and mathematics.

Methodology

To test the major hypothesis--that their foreign language grades are significantly higher than their grades in all their other subjects--I compared the students' grade point average for their foreign language courses with their grade point average for all their courses except foreign languages. A "t" test was made to determine the significance of the difference.

Also, "t" tests were run to determine the significance of the difference between their foreign language grades and their grades in English, history, biology, psychology, and mathematics, separately.

Then, "t" tests were run for each of these five major subjects (other than foreign languages) to determine significance of the difference between the grades for each of these subjects and all their other grades.

Finally, "t" tests were run to determine the significance of all the data collected according to sex and rank, and according to each different foreign language.

Results:

As can be seen on Table 4, the major hypothesis was supported. The sample students' foreign language grades are significantly higher than their other grades--the "t" value shows the data to be significant at the .05 level.

TABLE 4

Ranked, Average Grades and "t" Values** for 45 Sample Students

Course	Mean Grades*	Standard Deviation	"t" Value When Compared With For. Lang. Grades	"t" Value When Compared With All Other Grades
Foreign Language Courses	2.5555	0.9629	------	+2.080
History Courses	2.3478	0.9106	-1.040	+0.3195
Freshman English Courses	2.2616	0.7934	-1.563	-0.2772
Biology Courses	2.0952	0.8891	-2.330	-1.3711
Psychology Courses	2.0500	0.8256	-2.644	-1.7768
Mathematics Courses	1.8466	1.1550	-3.127	-2.4368

* Based on "A"=4.00; "B"=3.00; "C"=2.00; "D"=1.00; "E"=0.00
**"t" value with 88 df= 1.988 at the .05 level.

It is also interesting to note from Table 4 that the highest grades they made in any of their subjects that were tested were their foreign language grades, and that only in foreign languages were their grades significantly higher than their other grades.

The only other "t" values on Table 4 showing significance of difference are the negative "t" values, which demonstrate the students' signficantly lower grades in biology, psychology, and mathematics than their foreign language grades; and the negative "t" value for their mathematics grades showing their math grades were significantly lower than all their other grades. It is also interesting to note that the next highest grades of the students (to their foreign language grades) were made in history, with their freshman English grades third.

It was found that no valid predictions could be made from the data when it was divided according to sex, rank, or individual foreign languages because of the small size of the resulting samples. Therefore, no conclusions have been drawn based on the final two sub-problems. Tables 5 and 6 show the foreign language grades made by the sample students according to sex and rank. The females made a slightly higher grade average than the males, and the sophomores made a considerably higher grade average than did the students of the other ranks. From these tables, it is demonstrated, again, how amazingly few students in this sample made below average or failing grades in their foreign languages.

Conclusions and Implications:

No attempt was made in the course of this research to determine why these black students made such relatively high grades in foreign language courses; it was considered necessary to first test the truth of the hypothesis. The author hopes to explore the reasons for the results in a subsequent study. Also, access to the data was given with the understanding that data would be

TABLE 5

Foreign Language Grades by Sex

Sex	Number	No. Making "C" Average or Better	No. Making "B" Average or Better	Mean Grade in Foreign Languages
Males	24	20	10	2.462
Females	21	15	14	2.661

TABLE 6

Foreign Language Grades by Rank

Rank	Number	No. Making "C" Average or Better	No. Making "B" Average or Better	Mean Grade in Foreign Languages
Freshmen	22	18	13	2.469
Sophomores	11	9	9	2.909
Juniors	7	6	3	2.437
Seniors	5	4	2	2.320

obtained only from the official records.

Although this study concerns black students in foreign languages at only one university, it is believed that the positive results of the study should at least merit the attention of counselors, foreign language teachers, and those interested in developing programs for black students. It is hoped that this investigation will arouse enough interest that similar studies will be undertaken at other universities and in secondary schools.

The data from this study suggests that black college students are likely to be successful in a foreign language course, even though they may have difficulties with all their other subjects. Some information may be gained, also, as to the foreign languages in which these students will be most likely to be successful. Also, some trends (not significant, statistically) may be noted as to which other major academic subjects may be relatively easy or difficult for black students.

Information from this study may be especially useful to curriculum counselors on the secondary and college levels, since it is important that they should direct the black student into courses where he has the best chance to be successful. This information may have special import, in that many of these counselors may have discouraged black students from taking foreign languages, thinking they would have the best chance for success in other courses.

The implications may be meaningful, also, to the counselors helping black students plan a major or a career. At least one of the students in the sample chose to major in foreign languages when he saw that it was in this area that he was the most successful. Another student with whom I have worked, whose best subjects were French and English, declared a journalism major, with plans to become a foreign correspondent.

The members of foreign language departments should be interested in the information concerning these students' success in foreign languages, in general,

and in their foreign language, in particular. This knowledge may be a basis for attracting more majors into their areas.

Finally, the developers and counselors of the new black studies programs and of the many new recruiting programs to enroll more black students may find the information from this study especially helpful, since these persons are interested in developing courses for these students and in seeing that they have every opportunity to meet with a success experience on the regular college level--rather than spending their college years in remedial or irregular programs.